

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

REPORT OF WILLIAM SMITH, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR INTERNAL SERVICES to the:

CABINET: 18 OCTOBER

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMISSION: 17 NOVEMBER 2011

CABINET: 29 NOVEMBER 2011

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Subject: ONE STOP BUS

Purpose: To examine the extension of the One Stop Bus project; moving from grant maintained to mainstream funding, the benefits the bus could bring to Breckland's operations and the opportunity for co-delivery and trading services.

Recommendation(s):

Close project and focus on existing Customer Service Centres and better value, higher impact rural engagement activities such as attending Town and Parish Council meetings
Make arrangements for alternatives to be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The One Stop Bus is currently funded up to the end of September 2011 through a combination of 'Migration Impact Funding' and 'Leadership of Place' external funding awarded to the Breckland Partnership (LSP)
- 1.1.2 It offers a flexible and innovative way to deliver services which is both eye-catching and accessible to all and offers significant marketing and Public Relations potential
- 1.1.3 It is staffed by three 'Service Connector' Staff (Manager and two officers) and a driver (provided by Poultec and funded externally). Existing Customer Service staff at BDC are currently assisting on Saturdays where required (funded through external funds)
- 1.1.4 It operates every Thursday and Friday and the last Wednesday of each month visiting 17 rural locations across the district and Thetford Abbey Estate
- 1.1.5 Initially focussed on core Breckland customer service delivery in rural locations the bus commenced Saturday morning service in April 2011 to each of the 5 market towns on a rota basis
- 1.1.6 Appendix (A) and (B) provide available footfall statistics for the bus along with approximate costs
- 1.1.7 Appendix (C) provides comparative data for the smaller Customer Service Centres in Attleborough, Swaffham and Watton

- 1.1.8 Appendix (D) provides an analysis of enquiries received on the bus; 52% for non-Breckland services
- 1.1.9 Additional operating days have included Banham Poultry (offering benefits advice etc), Polling Station in Merton, Planning Consultation in Thetford office, cover in Dereham during Customer Service Centre relocation, Norfolk Show, village fetes, Wayland Show, Abbey Neighbourhood Centre, Golden Age Fair etc.
- 1.1.10 Providing training to customers, most notably the nationally advertised BBC i-click program, has generated a good deal of interest and elevated footfall considerably
- 1.1.11 Closing existing Customer Service Centre offices rented in Swaffham, Watton and Attleborough on Thursdays and Fridays could provide a source of staffing and the provision of rooms for other Breckland services. This move may however provoke an adverse reaction from rural residents. Alternatively, renegotiating the hire contracts could provide a small saving

1.2 Issues

- 1.2.1 Cost per contact on the bus has been high (Appendix A & B) particularly the rural service which is more than 100 times greater than the cost per contact in the Contact Centre
- 1.2.2 To date there has been no Breckland Council expenditure on the One Stop Bus or the associated projects. Funding will cease in September 2011
- 1.2.3 Service Connector staff (1.1.3) contracts end in September 2011. The Service Connector Manager has resigned providing an opportunity to extend the Service Connector officers contracts to October 2011
- 1.2.4 The project has been live for two years; partnerships with organisations such as Flagship, NHS direct have been developed but no income generated

1.3 Options

- 1.3.1 Close project and focus on existing Customer Service Centres and better value, higher impact rural engagement activities such as attending Town and Parish Council meetings. Exec member has already stated an interest in using Overview and Scrutiny to discuss further alternatives
- 1.3.2 Mainstream funding at a cost of approximately £59k per year for a like for like service (1.1.4/5)
- Replace Service Connector staff with existing Customer Service staff by closing the smaller Customer Service Centres on operational days
 - Focus on the successful elements of the project; market town presence, out of hours access, supporting in-house project activities (1.1.5/7)
 - Build on existing and develop new partnerships with external agencies to co-deliver or trade services to assist with costs
- 1.3.3 Mainstream funding at a cost of approximately £109k per year for a like for like service (1.1.4/5)
- Keep existing Service Connector staff (1.1.3) in post

- Focus on the successful elements of the project; market town presence, out of hours access, supporting in-house project activities (1.1.5/7)
- Build on existing and develop new partnerships with external agencies to co-deliver or trade services to assist with costs
- Maintain the existing smaller Customer Service Centres opening days

1.3.4 As per 1.3.2 but only extend the project to the close of financial year at an approximate cost of £59k * (5/12) = £24.58k

1.3.5 As per 1.3.3 but only extend the project to the close of financial year at an approximate cost of £109k * (5/12) = £45.42k

1.3.6 If Breckland withdraws from the current programme the option of hiring the bus for one off events still remains. The usual daily costs of £163 rental plus £126.25 for a driver may increase as we will have lost economies of scale

1.4 Reasons for recommendations

Close project and focus on existing Customer Service Centres and better value, higher impact rural engagement activities such as attending Town and Parish Council meetings. Make arrangements for alternatives to be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny.

1.4.1 Rural Programme: The cost per contact is almost 100 times greater than the telephone in rural areas

1.4.2 Town Programme: The cost per contact on the bus on Saturdays, when footfall should be at a peak, is greater than static CSC's during week days

1.4.3 Footfall for core customer services has not improved. Only the nationally advertised BBC i-click programme has driven up general footfall

1.4.4 Co-delivery and trading is unlikely to make a serious impact on costs

1.4.5 The positive work on co-delivery, trading, education and flexible opening times can be pursued and transferred to other venues and media

2. IMPLICATIONS

2.1 Risk

2.1.1 Reputational: Withdrawal of service may be seen as favouring the market towns over rural areas

2.1.2 Financial: It was envisaged that the bus, a high impact, marketable service, could generate income through co-delivery and trading services. Potential partners may question similar opportunities with the less publicised static Customer Service Centres

2.2 Financial

2.2.1 The two temporary Service Connector staff do not qualify for redundancy until 01.06.12

2.2.2 The bus is a substantial growth revenue budget item

2.2.3 The satellite equipment is part owned by Breckland and could be re-used/sold

2.3 Legal

2.3.1 Unison are satisfied with the circumstances leading to the potential redundancy of the two temporary staff

2.4 Equality and Diversity

2.4.1 No issues to consider

2.5 Other

2.5.1 None

3. Alignment to Council Priorities

3.1 Withdrawal of a service that reaches out is counter to Council aims but the value of the service needs to be weighed against the substantial costs

4. Wards/Communities Affected

4.1 All rural wards (2.1.1)

4.2 Areas with poor transport services

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Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix (A): Footfall and cost analysis for Bus Rural Programme

Appendix (B): Footfall and cost analysis for Bus Town Programme

Appendix (C): Footfall and cost analysis for Part Time Customer Service Centres

Appendix (D): Bus enquiry type